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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Update on ECDA Programs from May 2019 through April 2020

KANKAKEE, Ill. (July 21, 2020) – The City of Kankakee’s Economic and Community Development Agency (ECDA) has been working with residents and businesses through multiple programs during this past fiscal year, May 2019 through April 2020. The ECDA is always looking for more applicants and encourages residents to connect with them or visit their website at <https://ecda.citykankakee-il.gov/> for more information.

ECDA Programs, May 2019-April 2020:

- Homebuyer’s Incentive Program
 - 18 people received down payment assistance through the Homebuyer’s Incentive program. This means there are 18 new homeowners in the City of Kankakee.
 - This program is city-wide \$2,500.00 down payment assistance for income eligible individuals and families or income eligible census tract homes.
- Single Family Rehab Program
 - 26 homes were rehabbed.
 - This program is a city-wide emergency housing rehab for income eligible owner-occupied homes including work on furnace, roof, and foundation.
- Lead Abatement Program
 - Lead was removed from 14 homes.
 - This program helps with city-wide lead removal from income eligible rental units or owner-occupied homes to help keep pregnant women and children under the age of six healthy and free of lead poisoning.

- Single Family Rehab
 - 1 house was rehabbed through this program.
 - This program is city-wide housing rehab for income eligible owner-occupied homes.
- Home Accessibility Program
 - 1 house was rehabbed through this program.
 - This is a county-wide home accessibility program for income eligible individuals with disabilities so they can remain in their home.
- Public Services
 - Total amount allocated - \$68,540
 - Catholic Charities - \$12,040 for transitional housing furnishings and utilities
 - Fortitude Community Outreach - \$20,000 for shelter supplies
 - KCCSI - \$13,500 for senior nutrition program
 - Options - \$15,000 for portable ramp program and \$8,000 for homeless prevention
 - The purpose of the Public Service Program is to aid not-for-profit agencies that provide comprehensive services to low-to-moderate income persons in the City of Kankakee.

During October 2019, Mayor Wells-Armstrong combined the City's economic and community development departments under one umbrella which is now ECDA. "Prior to this administration, the City was functioning without a designated economic development professional which was of great disservice to this community. Many departments were working in isolation, as opposed to, collaboratively. Working in such a manner was not efficient and contributed to a stagnated economy. After years of scant economic growth, an increased interest in entrepreneurship, and a desire to be community-driven from a city services standpoint, it was important to create and hire a professional to meet the needs of businesses and the overall community. Brad Benoit, Business Attraction & Retention Coordinator, has improved the relationships between the City and the business community. With his background in business, customer service and entrepreneurship, Brad is able to advocate for business owners and elevate their needs which allows the City to make informed decisions that will improve the economic climate and create a supportive network for entrepreneurs," stated Mayor Wells-Armstrong.

With the Business Retention and Attraction Coordinator role filled during November 2019, 77 businesses have been visited or contacted with 30 percent completing full retention surveys. Seventy percent reported that sales were increasing and 95 percent would like to be a part of city endorsed business listings. Thirty-five percent of businesses own their property, and 87 percent are open to improving communication with city staff. One hundred percent reported the City of Kankakee as business-friendly but noted some challenges such as public perception of safety, city aesthetics, and entry-level workforce. On a scale of 1-5, the rating of workforce was: Availability 4.1, Quality 3.6, Stability 3.8 and the top city assets listed were location, cost of operations, and network/community. All this data was collected before COVID-19 restrictions were established in March 2020.

Outreach and engagement with residents have been a central focus of the ECDA team. This past year, the ECDA team hosted a booth at a multitude of community events such as Merchant Street Music Fest, back to school events, Kankakee Farmers' Market and Sunset Stroll on Schuyler. The ECDA team also attended various community meetings to facilitate presentations of programs and services. Also, the team utilized Survey Monkey to collect community feedback related to the City's use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and public service funds. During the fall, the ECDA team continued to host booths at events throughout the community including a Community Fair, Regional Economic Retail Event, Women's Fair, Expungement Summit/Community Resource & Job Fair, and the Family Read Night with the Kankakee Public Library. Three surveys were also distributed to residents regarding: Housing Needs, Non-Housing Needs, and Homeless Needs.

From the Housing Needs survey, a few things the data showed were:

- 47% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the available housing units in Kankakee meet the needs of the population
- 55% of respondents believe it is a high priority need to have housing for single family homes costing \$100,000 or less and apartments with three+ bedrooms

From the Non-Housing Needs survey, a few things the data showed were:

- 82% of respondents believe the need for crime awareness/prevention is a high priority
- 68% of respondents believe the need for homeless facilities is a high priority

From the Homeless Needs survey, a few things the data showed were:

- 86% of respondents believe there is a need in Kankakee for additional emergency shelter beds
- 82% of respondents believe more resources should be provided to transitional housing for the homeless

“The data collected from these surveys will assist the ECDA in creating strategies and developing resources to continue improving our neighborhoods and keep moving Kankakee Forward”, says Director Brewer-Watson. “We will be doing more surveys throughout this next year and I encourage all the residents in Kankakee to take a survey when asked. Surveys serve as helpful tools for us and allows the team to collect residents’ thoughts and address needs.”

Due to COVID-19 restrictions beginning in March 2020, the ECDA had a number of housing rehab projects that were put on hold. Those projects have since resumed as of June 2020. The office is still taking applications for all ECDA programs and residents can pick up applications Monday through Friday between 8 am and 4 pm. Residents and businesses can contact the ECDA for any questions at 815.933.0506.

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About the Economic and Community Development Agency (ECDA):

The Kankakee Economic and Community Development (ECDA) is a local government agency whose mission is to improve the lives of Kankakee residents and enhance the economic vitality of communities through housing, economic development and community development. The ECDA administers programs that serve the neighborhoods and residents of the City of Kankakee provided by federal, state and local funding. For more information, contact ECDA at 815-933-0506, Monday – Friday between 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

About the City of Kankakee, Illinois:

The City of Kankakee is dedicated to protecting, building and nurturing the community while enhancing lives. We are a historic, vibrant and active riverfront community. We continue to transform into an extraordinary place to dream, grow and thrive. Embracing our diversity, we strive to be progressive, inclusive and innovative. For more information on the City of Kankakee, please visit the website at www.citykankakee-il.gov.